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The Caucasus Revisited. Development of Semantic Oppositions from Puškin and Lermontov to the Present¹

1. Introduction

This article investigates the development of the image of the Caucasus in Russian poetry, prose and film from the middle of the nineteenth century up to the present day. It focuses on semantic oppositions that recur over time. As Lermontov has played an important role in determining the image of the Caucasus, a selection of his works, which are typically illustrative of these oppositions, will serve as a starting point. The extent to which Lermontov drew inspiration from Puškin will be examined, as well as the way in which the semantic oppositions present in the middle of the nineteenth century occur in Tolstoj's works, in the Soviet era and in recent literature and film.

To Lermontov (1814-1841), the Caucasus was a major source of inspiration. He spent time in the region not only as a child, but was later exiled to that region, the first time in 1837 after the publication of his critical poem *Smert' poëta* (*The Poet's Death*) on the occasion of Puškin's death. After a duel with a son of the French ambassador, Lermontov was sent to the Caucasus a second time in 1840. A year later he died in a duel in Pjatigorsk.²

Lermontov wrote a number of works in which the Caucasus plays a key role. It features in different genres. The Caucasus first occurs in 1828 in the *poëmy* (narrative poems) *Čerkesy* (*The Circassians*) and *Kavkazskij plennik* (*Prisoner of the Caucasus*). This genre remained attractive for Lermontov as a means of developing his thoughts about the Caucasus, as can be seen from the narrative poems *Kally* (1830-1831), *Izmail-Bej* (1832), *Aul Bastundži* (1833-1834; *The Caucasian Settlement Bastundži*), *Chadži Abrek* (1833), *Beglec* (by the end of the thirties; *The Deserter*), *Mcyri* (1839) and *Demon* (1841³; *The Demon*).⁴ Throughout his short life, Lermontov

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² For further biographical information, see I.L. Andronikov, 1977; L. Kelly, 1983; P. Urban, 2006, pp. 227-253.

³ There are different versions of *Demon*, on which Lermontov worked throughout his life. See M.Ju. Lermontov, 1962, II, pp. 545-641, and 698-700. Generally, in this article, M.Ju. Lermontov, *Polnoe sobranie sočinenij* (*Pss*), 1935-1937, will be used as the standard work to refer to Lermontov's works and related comments, but when more information can be found in another compilation of Lermontov's works, reference will be made thereto.

⁴ For more fragmented references to the Caucasus and related oriental themes in other narrative poems, see M.Ju. Lermontov, *Pss*, 1935, III, pp. 42, 45, 47, 69-70, 80-82, 95, 147-162, 319, 341 (XIX), 370-371 (XIX, XX), 374 (XXX), 377 (XXXIX), 393-394 (LXXXVII), 401 (CVIII), 402 (CXI), 408-410 (CXXX-CXXXV), 420 (4), 549, 551.

also wrote poetry inspired by the Caucasus. In this article, particular attention will be given to early poems, such as *Kavkaz* (1830; *The Caucasus*) and *Kavkazu* (1830; *For the Caucasus*). Illustrations of some important later poems are *Dary Tereka* (1839; *The Terek's Gifts*), *Kazač'ja kolybel'naja pesnja* (1840; *A Cossack Lullaby*)⁵, *Valerik* (1840; *The Valerik*) and *Tamara* (1841).⁶ Later in his life, in 1837, he also recorded a Caucasian legend, *Ašik-Kerib*, which he had heard from a local storyteller. Another text in the genre of the character sketch (somewhat atypical of Lermontov) is *Kavkazec* (probably 1841; *The Caucasian*). In addition, the chapter *Bëla* of his masterpiece novel *Geroj našego vremeni* (1837-1839; *A Hero of Our Time*) is particularly illustrative, as it contains a number of Caucasian characters.⁷ In other prose and theatre works the Caucasian and related oriental themes also occur, but in a more fragmented manner.⁸ In addition to these, Lermontov produced many sketches, drawings and paintings showing the Caucasian mountains and their inhabitants throughout his life (see M.Ju. Lermontov, 2001, VIII).

This article focuses on semantic oppositions in a selection of Lermontov's Caucasian works, and the development of these oppositions over time in works of other writers and artists. Two sets of semantic antagonisms are identified. The first one relates to freedom and imprisonment and is closely connected with the imperialist Caucasian wars of the nineteenth century. Later, the theme becomes the subject of a comical film during the Soviet era, after which it forcefully reoccurs in works of writers during the post-Soviet unrest and war in the Caucasus. The second set of antagonisms operates on a more personal, psychological level and relates to male-female relationships and love and solitude.

There are two main reasons for focusing on these different types of semantic antagonism. First, it enhances the understanding of Lermontov's works. Earlier authors may have identified individual oppositions (e.g., Ram has focused on freedom and imprisonment, while Costlow has examined male-female relationships), but these oppositions have not been examined jointly. Secondly, studying semantic antagonisms in Lermontov's works helps to understand the influence he may have had on later literary and cultural developments and perceptions in society in general. This is shown by the analysis of works of Tolstoj, Makanin and Bodrov (earlier also discussed by Ram), as well as of Gajdaj and Paradžanov (not examined earlier in this context to the author's knowledge).

Sections 2-4 below contain examples of works showing the development of the two types of antagonism identified above. The criteria of selection for the works discussed in these sections are the following: they should show semantic oppositions which recur over time, and should be written by different authors and appear in different genres (such as prose, poetry and film). As such, the examples given show

⁵ For an analysis of the cultural impact of this poem, see V. Golovin, 2000.

⁶ For these and other examples, see M.Ju. Lermontov, *Pss*, 1936, I, pp. 41, 43, 47-48, 66, 96, 97, 98, 102-103, 117, 169, 171, 231(9), 328-329, 330, 336, 341-342; II, pp. 32, 35, 36-37, 38, 41-42, 46-48, 50-52, 53-55, 61-62, 88, 89-96, 111-112, 123-126, 127, 128, 129, 131, 134-135, 136-138, 151. See also M.Ju. Lermontov, 1961, I, pp. 570-571, 572.

⁷ For an analysis of a number of the literary works mentioned, see A. Gadžiev, 1982, pp. 128-142.

⁸ See, for example, M.Ju. Lermontov, *Pss*, 1935, IV, pp. 147, 224, 252, 331, 339, 410; 1937, V, pp. 76-78, 114, 156, 345, 348-349 (4), 351 (11), 357 (22), 357-358 (24).

the repetitiveness of certain Caucasian themes. The works are presented in a largely chronological manner, from those by Puškin and Lermontov to a story by Tolstoj, to cinema of the Soviet era, up to literature and cinema of the present day.

Section 2 discusses the opposition between freedom and captivity, as well as the related tensions between the Caucasian and Russian cultures. This section starts with a comparison between Puškin's poem *Kavkaz* (*The Caucasus*) and Lermontov's early poem *Kavkazu* and then investigates how the themes mentioned develop in Lermontov's later works. Section 3 also relates to the notions of freedom as opposed to captivity, but investigates more specifically how these notions are applied in Lermontov's early work *Kavkazskij plennik*. It compares this narrative poem with Puškin's and Tolstoj's nineteenth-century works with the same title, as well as with the twentieth-century films *Kavkazskaja plennica* (*Female Prisoner of the Caucasus*) and *Kavkazskij plennik* (*Prisoner of the Caucasus*), and finally with Makanin's post-Soviet story *Kavkazskij plennyj* (*Captive of the Caucasus*). Section 4 focuses on a second important set of related semantic oppositions, i.e., the different characteristics of men and women and love as opposed to destruction. These oppositions are illustrated in particular on the basis of the local tale *Ašik-Kerib* recorded by Lermontov, and transformed by Paradžanov into a film in 1988. Section 5 concludes with an outline of the different types of semantic oppositions in Lermontov's and other artists' works.

Besides *Kavkazu*, *Kavkazskij plennik* and *Ašik-Kerib*, which are Lermontov's key works analysed here, other of his Caucasian works will be mentioned in the following analysis as additional examples. In this article, no sharp distinction is made between the author on the one hand and the 'lyrical I' in poems and key protagonists in other works on the other hand. Translations are by the author, unless indicated otherwise.

2. Freedom and imprisonment, and tensions between Russians and Caucasians

This section takes up the first set of semantic oppositions in the context of the imperial wars in the Caucasus in the nineteenth century. It deals with the opposition between freedom and imprisonment and, in connection to this theme, with tensions between Russians and Caucasian people. These are the prevailing themes in Puškin's 1829 poem *Kavkaz* (see subsection 2.1), and Lermontov's 1830 poem *Kavkazu* (subsection 2.2). Puškin has been an important source of inspiration to Lermontov. Yet, Lermontov in particular is associated with the Caucasus, as generally the Caucasus is less present in Puškin's works than throughout Lermontov's oeuvre. The way in which Lermontov presents tensions between Russians and Caucasians in a number of his later works is therefore examined in subsection 2.3.

2.1. Puškin's *Kavkaz*

From May to September 1829, Puškin (1799-1837) travelled to Arzrum in Turkey, where the Russian army fought a successful war against the Turks. On this trip, he

passed the Caucasus, which inspired him to write a number of poems, including *Kavkaz* (1829).⁹ This poem shows a gradual descent from the top of a Caucasian mountain down to the rivers at its feet:

Кавказ подо мною. Один в вышине
Стою над снегами у края стремнины;
Орел, с отдаленной поднявшись вершины,
Парит неподвижно со мной наравне.
Отселе я вижу потоков рождение
И первое грозных обвалов движение.

Здесь тучи смиренно идут подо мной;
Сквозь них, низвергаясь, шумят водопады;
Под ними утесов нагие громады;
Там ниже мох тощий, кустарник сухой;
А там уже рощи, зеленые сени,
Где птицы щебечут, где скачут олени.

А там уж и люди гнездятся в горах,
И ползают овцы по злачным стремнинам,
И пастырь нисходит к веселым долинам,
Где мчится Арагва в тенистых берегах,
И нищий наездник таится в ущельи,
Где Терек играет в свирепом весельи;

Играет и воет, как зверь молодой,
Завидевший пищу из клетки железной;
И бьется о берег в вражде бесполезной,
И лижет утесы голодной волной ...
Вотще! нет ни пищи ему, ни отрады:
Теснят его грозно немые громады. (A.S. Puškin, 1948, III.1, p. 196)

“Beneath me the peaks of the Caucasus lie,
My gaze from the snow-bordered cliff I am bending;
From her sun-lighted eyrie the Eagle ascending
Floats movelessly on in a line with mine eye.
I see the young torrent’s first leap to the ocean,
And the cliff-cradled lawine essay its first motion.

Beneath me the clouds in their silentness go,
The cataract through them in thunder down-dashing,
Far beneath them bare peaks in the sunny ray flashing,
Weak moss and dry shrubs I can mark yet below.
Dark thickets still lower – green meadows are blooming,
Where the thristle is singing, and reindeer are roaming.

⁹ See, for example, also the poems: *Na cholmach Gruzii ležit nočnaja mgla* (*On the Hills of Georgia Lies the Darkness of Night*), *Iz Gafiza* (*From Haviz*), *Don* (*The River Don*), *Obval* (*Avalanche*), *Delibaš, Monastyr’ na Kazbeke* (*Kazbek Monastery*) and *Mež gornych <sten><?> nesetsja Terek* (*The Terek Rushes midst Mountain <Walls><?>*). In addition, see Puškin’s travel diary *Putešestvie v Arzrum* (*A Journey to Arzrum*) published later, in 1836.



Here man, too, has nested his hut, and the flocks
On the long grassy slopes in their quiet are feeding,
And down to the valley the shepherd is speeding,
Where Arágvá gleams out from her wood-crested rocks.
And there in his crags the poor robber is hiding,
And Terek in anger is wrestling and chiding.

Like a fierce young Wild Beast, how he bellows and raves,
Like that Beast from his cage when his prey he espieth;
'Gainst the bank, like a Wrestler, he struggleth and plyeth,
And licks at the rock with his ravening waves.
In vain, though wild River! dumb cliffs are around thee,
And sternly and grimly their bondage hath bound thee."
(A. Pushkin, 1999, III, pp. 97-98 [transl.: I. Sprout et al.])

The stunning natural setting plays a key role in the poem. The repeated use of, for example, the words "stremnina" ("cliff, slopes"), "utes" ("peaks, rock"), "gromada" ("cliffs") and "b[e]reg" ("rocks, bank") illustrates this. The narrator standing at the top of the mountains makes a gradual movement downwards with his eyes. From magnificent mountain peaks and rocks to green meadows and, ultimately, to the rivers Terek and Arágvá which are surrounded by the mountain tops. The natural setting in the final stanzas suggests a feeling of imprisonment, of imposed obedience, of suppressed rebellion.¹⁰

One wonders whether this stunning natural scenery is all that the poem intends to convey. An additional reason for the movement from the top downwards, an additional layer of meaning to the poem can be found in the following unpublished extra stanza:

Так буйную вольность законы теснят
Так дикое племя [под] властью тоскует
Так ныне безмолвный Кавказ негодует
Так чуждые силы его тяготят ... (A.S. Puškin, 1949, III.2, p. 792)

"Thus laws constrain unruly freedom / Thus the wild tribe yearns [under] the yoke / Thus at present the speechless Caucasus is indignant / Thus alien forces oppress it ..."

It is exactly this stanza which gives the poem focus. It clarifies the downward movement. The mountains are a personification of Russia, which has captured the river (a personification of the notion of freedom and the free people of the Caucasus) in a tight grip. Arguably, the additional dimension rendered by this last stanza, makes it an integral and essential part of the poem. Understandably, the stanza could not be published in Puškin's time, for how could the censor accept this call for freedom and the protest against the occupation of the Caucasus? (See also H. Ram, 2005, pp. 392-393.)

¹⁰ In an earlier version, Puškin starts the poem with "Dostig ja svjaščennoj Kavkaza veršiny" ("I reached the sacred peak of the Caucasus"). This, however, bereaves the poem of much of its force, as it does not start at the very top of the mountain. When starting right at the top, the movement towards the bottom has a stronger effect. See A.S. Puškin, 1949, III.2, p. 791.

2.2. Lermontov's *Kavkazu*

Lermontov's Caucasian works show that he admired the region intensely, its natural splendour and forcefulness in particular. Many Romantic works are placed in an exotic topos, but to Lermontov the Caucasus was much more than that, as he visited the region repeatedly. His works show a profound interest in topography and geographical detail. The 'Caucasus' is a broad notion to him which encompasses Dagestan, Chechnya, the Caucasian mountains proper, and Georgia. Not only are individual mountains named, but also the rivers Aragva and Terek feature many times, often serving as a boundary between Russians and Caucasians. Lermontov's works also contain a number of Turkish and other oriental references.

In many instances, the Caucasian landscape functions as a conduit of different emotions. Lermontov's early poem *Kavkaz* (1830) is largely biographical. In the first stanza he compares the Caucasus with his own country: "kak sladkuju pesnju otčizny moej" (M.Ju. Lermontov, *Pss*, 1936, I, p. 66; "like one's motherland's music of joy", M. Lermontov, 1983, p. 39 [transl.: A. Liberman]).¹¹ In the second stanza he associates the Caucasus with memories of a woman: "ta step' povtorjala mne pamjatnyj glas" (ibid.; "her voice from the valley would give me a sign", transl. ibid.).¹² In the third stanza, he refers to a "paru božestvennyh glaz" (ibid.; "the eyes that I know were divine", transl. ibid.) which he saw in the Caucasian landscape.¹³ In *Beglec*, the Caucasian landscape is a place that drives one crazy (in the absence of a social infrastructure). In *Mcyri*, the young Caucasian protagonist longs for the mountains and nature, which to him represent his origins and freedom, as opposed to the monastery in which he feels imprisoned.¹⁴

Lermontov's *Kavkazu* (*Pss*, 1936, I, p. 96)¹⁵ deserves particular attention in this context, as this poem, like Puškin's *Kavkaz*, uses the Caucasian topos in order to make a statement in relation to the notions of freedom and captivity. Lermontov's poem, like Puškin's, is set in the rough and rocky mountain landscape of the Caucasus. Lermontov also takes up the war in the Caucasus and laments the loss of "vol'nost'" ("freedom") and "svoboda" ("liberty"). He describes the Caucasus as a land in which there is no more "vol'nosti prostoj" ("simple freedom"), as a land "nesčast'jami polna" ("full of sorrows"), "pod dikoj pelenoju mgly" ("under a thick shroud of darkness"), where freedom has died. The critique, which is also inherent in Puškin's *Kavkaz* when read in connection with the unpublished stanza, can hardly be misread. The two poems, which were written in 1829 (Puškin's *Kavkaz*) and 1830 (Lermontov's *Kavkazu*) respectively, suggest that Puškin and Lermontov in that period had more or less the same ideas about the political situation in the Caucasus.

¹¹ Alternative, more literal translation: "like a sweet song from my country".

¹² Alternative, more literal translation: "that steppe recalled a voice well-known to me".

¹³ Alternative, more literal translation: "a pair of heavenly eyes". The comments to the poem suggest that these are the eyes of a girl whom Lermontov fell in love with earlier in the Caucasus. See M.Ju. Lermontov, *Pss*, 1936, I, p. 438; 1937, V, pp. 348-349.

¹⁴ For an interesting discourse on the relationship between *topos* and *ethnos* in Lermontov's Caucasian works, see R. Reid, 1992.

¹⁵ The opening verses 1-4 of *Aul Bastundži* coincide with parts of the poems *Kavkaz* and *Kavkazu*.

2.3. Russians and Caucasians opposed to one another in Lermontov's later works

Closely connected to the opposition between freedom and imprisonment in Puškin's *Kavkaz* and Lermontov's *Kavkazu* is the contrast in Lermontov's works between the Russian and Cossack soldiers on the one hand and the Caucasian peoples on the other. Most Caucasian works in some way feature a battle, either prominently or in the background. Sometimes Russians are depicted as captured victims of the savage Caucasians (*Kavkazskij plennik*), sometimes as unjust occupiers (*Izmail-Bej*), often as those who won a victory in battle (*Čerkesy*, *Beglec*). In all cases, however, there is a conflict. This conflict, which had its origin in Russian imperialistic politics, has many different aspects, e.g., political, ethnic and religious. Typically, the conflict cannot be overcome.

This can be illustrated by focusing on the religious aspect of the tensions between Caucasians and Russians. Generally, religion is a recurring thematic thread throughout Lermontov's Caucasian works. They contain regular references to, for example, Mohammed, Allah and the Koran. In *Kally*, the local mullah plays a destructive and fatal role. The opposition between the orthodox religion of the Russians and the Islamic orientation which occurs in parts of the Caucasus is apparent in, for example, *Geroj našego vremeni*. Běla does not want to convert to Christianity, even if this means that she will not meet Pečorin in the hereinafter. In *Izmail-Bej*, a Caucasian is educated in Russia but returns to his fatherland and fights for its liberation. Izmail-Bej tries to overcome the tension between his Russian education and a girl he loved in Russia on the one hand and his desire to liberate his fatherland on the other hand, but his attempts are unsuccessful. In the dramatic closing scene, when the protagonist dies, it appears that he carries a cross on his breast. For this reason, his comrades refuse to bury him. Izmail-Bej's fate, like that of most of Lermontov's Caucasian heroes, is therefore tragic. He dies in loneliness. The narrative poem's last line is: "Pust' končit žizn', kak načal, odinok." (M.Ju. Lermontov, *Pss*, 1935, III, p. 257; "May his life end as it began, lonely."). The narrative poem *Mcyri* is another example of the oppositions between Caucasian – Russian and freedom – captivity in a religious context. In this work, a young boy from the mountains lives in a Russian monastery in Georgia. Because he feels a captive and oppressed, he withers away and, ultimately, dies. In this case, like in *Geroj našego vremeni* and *Izmail-Bej*, the oppositions have not been overcome and the plot ends in destruction.

Exceptionally, however, some of the characters in Lermontov's works reconcile the opposition Russian – Caucasian. For example, in the ironical character sketch *Kavkazec*, Lermontov stages a Russian who lived in the Caucasus for so many years that he identifies himself with the Caucasus.¹⁶ A clear example of this type of man is also Maksim Maksimych in *Běla*. Symbolically, Maksim Maksimych is the officer in charge of a fortress on the border of Russia. He has been in the Caucasus for many years, feels connected to the region, and tries to find a balance between his compatriots and the local people, with whom he generally has good relationships and whose habits he partly takes over.

¹⁶ On *Kavkazec*, see Ė.Ė. Najdič, 2001, and P.A. Vyrypaev, 1964.

All in all, Lermontov's characters usually do not succeed in overcoming national, ethnic and religious differences. With the exception of Maksim Maksimych and the character described in *Kavkazec*, Russians and Caucasians remain strangers to each other.

3. Prisoners of the Caucasus

The theme of freedom as opposed to imprisonment, discussed in section 2 above, has taken a particular shape in the form of the theme of the prisoner of the Caucasus, which is the topic of this section. This latter theme is remarkably recurrent in Russian culture. It features in nineteenth-century Romantic and Realist literature, comes up again in cinema in the Soviet era, and is also present in literature and cinema of the post-Soviet period.

Subsection 3.1 describes the way in which Puškin, Lermontov and Tolstoj present the theme in the nineteenth century against the background of the imperialistic policy of expansion of that period. It pays attention to differences among the different versions of *Kavkazskij plennik* by these authors, and also identifies the core concept which their works have in common. Subsequently, subsection 3.2 describes how the theme comes to the surface during the Soviet period, when a comical film was made with a female prisoner of the Caucasus. Subsection 3.3 focuses on a story by Makanin and a film by Bodrov in the post-Soviet period against the background of the violent and long-lasting war in Chechnya, and tensions and instability in other parts of the Caucasus.

3.1. Prisoners of the Caucasus in the nineteenth century

In the nineteenth century, three different versions of *Kavkazskij plennik* were written by Puškin, Lermontov and Tolstoj. The first to do so was Puškin in 1820-1821 (A.S. Puškin, 1937, IV, pp. 89-117, 285-367 and 468). Shortly after that, in 1828, Lermontov wrote his version of the story; in this year he was going to be only fourteen (see M.Ju. Lermontov, *Pss*, 1935, III, pp. 20-38 and 559). Forty four years later, in 1872, Tolstoj decided to incorporate his interpretation of *Kavkazskij plennik* in his *Četvertaja russkaja kniga dlja čtenija* (*Fourth Russian Book for Reading*; see L.N. Tolstoj, 1957, ser. 1, XXI, pp. 304-326, 334-338, 668-669).

The works by Puškin, Lermontov and Tolstoj are *different in a number of respects*. As far as genre is concerned, Puškin and Lermontov chose narrative poems, whereas Tolstoj opted for a *byl'* (true story) in prose. The writers also decided on different structures. Puškin's work is subdivided in a dedication, two sections without a numbering system (including a song), and an epilogue. Lermontov starts with a short quote, while the main part of his work consists of two sections with a numbering system (also including a song). Tolstoj, more straightforwardly opted for a subdivision of six sections.

Moreover, the narrative content of the works differs. In Puškin's case, there is one prisoner, in Lermontov's version there are many prisoners, whereas there are two

prisoners in Tolstoj's. Puškin and Lermontov sketch a romantic love affair between the prisoner and a native village girl, who, in both versions assists the prisoner in his attempt to escape and ultimately commits suicide by jumping into water. In Tolstoj's version, the love affair is less intense. Only after a first self-reliant attempt to escape, the girl assists in a second one. Moreover, she does not die tragically, but lives on. In Puškin's story, the prisoner manages to escape, whereas in Lermontov's version, the prisoner's attempt to escape is not successful as he is killed by the father of the village girl (who can therefore also be held responsible for the resulting death of his own daughter). In Tolstoj's narrative, both prisoners manage to escape.

Explanations for some of these differences are that the authors lived in different periods of time, differed in age and had different literary goals. Lermontov (1814-1841) was very young and much influenced by Puškin (1799-1837) when he wrote his *Kavkazskij plennik*. One of his goals may have been to further develop his writing skills. It is likely that Puškin wrote his version for publication, and his *Kavkazskij plennik* is rather a reflection of personal experiences and opinions of the Caucasian war, of being in exile.¹⁷ Both Puškin and Lermontov lived in a time when Romanticism was a key literary movement, and this is reflected in their style and use of language. Tolstoj (1828-1910), on the other hand, was older and lived in a later period when Realism had gained ground. He gives more realistic and detailed descriptions of, for example, the pain during the fight leading to the kidnap, the negotiations for a ransom, the attempts to become friends with the villagers, the wounded feet during flight. Moreover, Tolstoj had the clearly different goal of *npravoučenie*, the moral education of his readers, which, for example, explains the use of a relatively plain language.

Even if there are clear differences in the works by Puškin, Lermontov and Tolstoj, it is nevertheless evident that there is also a *distinct unifying element*. In this respect, Ram's work in particular is revealing (see H. Ram, 1999; H. Ram, 2003, in particular chapter 4). He points to the fundamental opposition between freedom and imprisonment, as an explanation of the continued attraction to the theme of the prisoner of the Caucasus.

Both the Russian and the native are associated with both freedom and imprisonment. From the perspective of a Russian, the Caucasus on the one hand represents freedom, because of its geographical remoteness from the autocratic tsarist regime, its impressive mountain landscapes and its independent-minded inhabitants. On the other hand, the Caucasus remains subject to the imperial regime in light of the imperialist war with the goal to incorporate the region. Many of the Russians in the region were actually sent there to carry out that war and, in that sense, are still pris-

¹⁷ The tone of Puškin's *Kavkazskij plennik* differs significantly from that of his poem *Kavkaz* (see subsection 2.1 above), which was written approximately ten years later. This becomes evident when one makes a comparison with the epilogue to *Kavkazskij plennik*, in which Puškin strikes a much more Russian nationalistic tone. Think, for example, of the references to "naš orel dvuglavyj" (A.S. Puškin, 1937, IV, p. 114; "our two-headed eagle") and the Russian general Kotljarevskij who is celebrated as "bič Kavkaza" (ibid.; "scourge of the Caucasus"). But even if compared to the rest of *Kavkazskij plennik*, in which, overall, Puškin's stance is unequivocal and unclear, there is a distinct contrast. *Kavkaz* clearly shows a feeling of compassion and identification with those who lost their freedom. See also H. Ram, 2005, pp. 383-391.

oners of the regime.¹⁸ In addition to this political ‘captivity’, there is also the risk of being physically captured as happens to the Russian soldiers in the different versions of *Kavkazskij plennik*.

From the perspective of the native Caucasian, Russians are by no means captives, but captors, representing a nation of oppressors. The native is the captive of the war launched by Russia. In all nineteenth-century versions of *Kavkazskij plennik*, he is also the captor, though, of the imprisoned Russian soldier(s). Like the Russian, the native is therefore at the same time captor and captive.

The opposition between freedom and imprisonment also features in other works by Lermontov. Bëla in *Geroj našego vremeni*, for example, is, in fact, the prisoner of Pečorin (and of Maksim Maksimych, who is the officer in charge of the fortress). Likewise, the Caucasian boy in *Mcyri* is the prisoner of the monastery he lives in.

3.2. The Soviet period’s *Kavkazskaja plennica*

After Stalin’s death in 1953, the political climate in the Soviet Union became less repressive and allowed more freedom to artists, including cinematographers, even if Socialist Realism clearly remained the standard to adhere to. Mainly in the sixties and the early seventies, Gajdaj directed a series of highly successful film comedies.¹⁹ One of these was named *Kavkazskaja plennica, ili novye priklučenija Šurika* (*Prisoner of the Caucasus, or Šurik’s New Adventures*).²⁰ This film takes up the same themes of freedom and imprisonment as the works of the nineteenth century examined above. The imperialist war of that period is over, however, and, in line with Communist ideology, national tensions have officially disappeared. In Gajdaj’s film, therefore, the tone has profoundly changed.

His comedy, in which one may easily detect ironical features, suggests that there is no tension whatsoever. In the film, national tensions are overcome by the Soviet state and the Communist ideal of *družba narodov* (friendship of peoples). Moreover, the

¹⁸ In his travel diary *Putešestvie v Arzrum*, Puškin writes: “Арпачай! наша граница! Это стоило Арарата. Я поскакал к реке с чувством неизъяснимым. Никогда еще не видал я чужой земли. Граница имела для меня что-то таинственное; с детских лет путешествия были моею любимой мечтою. Долго вел я потом жизнь кочующую, скитаясь то по югу, то по северу, и никогда еще не вырывался из пределов необъятной России. Я весело въехал в заветную реку, и добрый конь вынес меня на турецкий берег. Но этот берег был уже завоеван: я всё еще находился в России.” (See A.S. Puškin, 1948, VIII.1, p. 463; “Arpachai! our border! This was as good as Ararat. I galloped toward the river with an indescribable feeling. I had never before seen foreign soil. The border held something mysterious for me; from childhood travels had been my cherished dream. For a long time I then led a nomadic life, wandering now around the South, now the North, and never before had I broken out from the borders of immense Russia. I rode happily into the sacred river, and my good horse carried me out on the Turkish bank. But this bank had already been conquered: I was still in Russia.” A. Pushkin, 1974, p. 51 [transl.: B. Ingemanson])

¹⁹ For an introduction to Gajdaj’s life, see G. Dolmatovskaya/I. Shilova, 1978, pp. 84-92. On the political context in which Gajdaj worked, see chapters VI and VII of L. H. Cohen, 1974, which cover the period from 1956 until 1970.

²⁰ Kinostudija Mosfil’m, 1967. Other highly successful films were, for example, *Soveršenno ser’ezno* (1961; *Absolutely Serious*), *Operatsija “Y” i drugie priklučenija Šurika* (1965; *Operation “Y” and Šurik’s Other Adventures*), and *Brilliantovaja ruka* (1968; *The Diamond Arm*).



male captive with his dilemmas is replaced by an independent, unequivocal female captive. Tensions between different nationalities are reduced to something that can be joked about. The film suggests that, under the Soviet regime, the opposition between freedom and imprisonment, between different nationalities no longer exists.

The film gives playful twists to themes that are common to the works of the nineteenth century. Nina is on a summer work camp in the Caucasian mountains and is a typical Soviet girl: “studentka, komsomolka, sportsmenka, krasavica” (“student, Komsomol member, sportswoman, beauty”). The local Communist chief notices her and orders Nina’s uncle and three useless and comical ‘helpers’ to kidnap her. In the film, therefore, no boy soldier, but a girl is kidnapped; there is no *plennik* (‘male prisoner’), but a *plennica* (‘female prisoner’). Moreover, Nina’s imprisonment is a farce. Nina manages to escape independently, without really needing the assistance of her ‘helper’, Šurik, who is as comical as the assistants of the Communist chief.

Local customs are represented as funny and ridiculous. Think, for example, of Šurik’s ethnographical mission in search of “fol’klor” (“folklore”), which results in a series of toasts with Šurik. The Communist chief remarks that local customs don’t exist anymore in the city, only “vysoko v gorach” (“high up in the mountains”), but fools Šurik with the ancient rite of kidnapping of the bride as a justification for the kidnapping of Nina. At the end of the film, he also begs to be judged by Soviet law, and not by that of the mountain peoples. Generally, local customs have been replaced by all sorts of Soviet tokens, such as the *dvorec brakosočetanija* (‘wedding palace’), the Komsomol movement, and the classical ballet on television.

All in all, the film, with a touch of irony, conveys the message that there is no room for oppositions between different ethnic groups and cultures in the Soviet period.

3.3. The post-Soviet period

In the post-Soviet period, Makanin and Bodrov take up the prisoner of the Caucasus theme. Their works strike a serious tone again. They describe or hint at violence and show the brutality of war. After the collapse of the USSR, national tensions in the Caucasus become an issue again, leading, for example, to the war in Chechnya. When compared to the works of the nineteenth century, in particular those of Puškin and Lermontov, the descriptions in the post-Soviet works are more realistic. But at the core, they feature the same tensions between Russians and Caucasians, and clearly take up the theme of freedom as opposed to captivity.

Makanin wrote his story *Kavkazskij plennyj* (see Vl.S. Makanin, 2003, IV, pp. 350-374) from June to September 1994, i.e., just before the escalation of violence and the start of the war in Chechnya. He adapted the nineteenth-century theme of prisoner of the Caucasus in several ways.

His story is set against the background of the reality of a war at the end of the twentieth century. A convoy of Russian trucks is stuck at a mountain pass controlled by Chechens. Two soldiers are sent to the main military base for a solution. On this dangerous mission, they go to the house of the commander, who is trading weapons for food with a Caucasian chief. They are ordered to work in his garden. One of them, Vova, has a sexual encounter with a woman in the village, who tells him that she had

recently been raped by four men. The other, Rubachin, goes on a raid and captures a young native boy, whom he has to kill on their way back due to the danger of approaching Caucasians. Makanin convincingly sketches the soldiers' psychological reactions to the realities of war, such as danger, hierarchy, sexuality and boredom, as well as the soldiers' relationship with the natives and people back home.

Remarkably, in Makanin's story, the captive is not a Russian male (or, like in *Kavkazskaja plennica*, a pretty Soviet girl), but a Caucasian boy. Moreover, Makanin gives a new twist to the theme of sexuality. The nineteenth-century stories all feature a love affair between the captured soldier and an indigenous village girl, while also *Kavkazskaja plennica* shows a heterosexual romance between Nina and Šurik. Makanin's story, however, has a clear homosexual erotic element. Right from the beginning, the Caucasian boy is characterised as very beautiful, like a young woman. The comparison with a woman is repeated several times. This beauty also immediately strikes Rubachin, who slowly becomes aware of this sensation that is entirely new to him. Slowly, the intimacy and the tension between the two evolve, resulting in a night during which they have actual physical contact. The story does not describe this contact in detail, but the new intimacy is evident from the events that follow, e.g., from the way the boy touches Rubachin when he carries him over a river the next morning. Therefore, in addition to danger, shame also could have been a motive for Rubachin to kill the boy and, thereby, re-establish his masculinity. Rubachin's affection for the boy is nonetheless strong, as is evident from the circumstance that he buries him wearing the socks knit by his mother.

Makanin's approach to the freedom – captivity theme is subtle. In the conversation between the Russian commander and the Caucasian chief, both point out that the other is a captive (see *ibid.*, pp. 353-354). Moreover, whereas the Caucasian boy is the physical captive, he, on a psychological level, has Rubachin in his grip when he seduces him and appears in his dreams at the end of the story. Thus, captivity does not operate on a physical level only, but also on a psychological, mental level.²¹

Bodrov's 1996 film *Kavkazskij plennik* (Orion Pictures Corporation, 1996) is set in the reality of the already ongoing Chechen war. It draws more heavily on nineteenth-century motives than does Makanin's story, and comes especially close to Tolstoj's narrative. Caucasian villagers capture two Russian soldiers, one of whom develops a romantic relationship with a village girl. The soldiers try to escape twice, the second time with the assistance of the girl. There are, however, also significant differences from Tolstoj's story. Notably, as a result of the first attempt to escape, one of the Russian soldiers is killed. The other nonetheless ultimately regains his freedom.

Compared to the nineteenth-century works by Puškin, Lermontov and Tolstoj, the film has a pacifist character. By focusing on the human suffering caused to parents when they lose their children, on both the Russian and the Caucasian sides, the war loses any significance. The father who captured the soldiers and lost his son, overcomes vengeance and revenge, and lets the surviving young Russian soldier go. During the closing scene, the young soldier yells "stojte, ne nado!" ("Stop, don't do

²¹ On this story, see also H. Ram, 1999, pp. 10-11. That Lermontov has inspired Makanin, is apparent from his work *Andegraund, ili Geroj našego vremeni*. See V.I.S. Makanin, 1999.

it!”) at Russian helicopters. Does he try to convince them not to bomb Caucasian targets and the people whom he has come to love?²²

4. Ašik-Kerib, Minstrel of the Caucasus

This section deals with Lermontov's and Paradžanov's interpretations of the folk tale *Ašik-Kerib*. In 1837, Lermontov wrote down this folk tale, which he had heard from a local storyteller in the Caucasus.²³ The tale *Ašik-Kerib* was widespread throughout the Caucasus and in Turkey, which explains the subtitle *Tureckaja skazka* (*A Turkish Tale*).²⁴ In 1988, the Armenian artist Paradžanov took Lermontov's recorded version as the basis of a film, also titled *Ašik-Kerib* (Gruzija Fil'm). The following two subsections examine Lermontov's and Paradžanov's works.

4.1. Lermontov's recording

Before outlining the content of Lermontov's tale, it is useful to examine what Ašik-Kerib means. In the tale itself, an *ašik* is described as a “balalaečnik” (M.Ju. Lermontov, *Pss*, 1937, V, p. 177), a “balalaika player”. The comments describe an *ašik* as a “‘vljublennyj’, ‘vozljublennyj’, pozdnee ‘narodnyj pevec-muzykant’” (M.Ju. Lermontov, 1962, IV, p. 648; “‘someone in love’, ‘a lover’, later ‘folk singer/musician’”). A *kerib*, according to Lermontov, is a “‘niščij’” (M.Ju. Lermontov, *Pss*, 1937, V, p. 182; “‘pauper’”). The comments describe a *kerib* as a “‘čužezemec’, ‘skitalec’, ‘bednjak’” (M.Ju. Lermontov, 1962, IV, p. 648; “‘foreigner’, ‘wanderer’, ‘poor man’”). Indeed, in Lermontov's story, Ašik-Kerib is a wandering minstrel in search of fortune and love.

Ašik-Kerib and Magul'-Megeri live in Tbilisi and are very much in love. Ašik-Kerib, however, is very poor and Magul'-Megeri is from a rich family. Before marrying, Ašik-Kerib therefore wants to earn his own fortune, and Magul'-Megeri promises to wait seven years for him. If he does not return within that period, she will marry his rival Kuršud-Bek. At the beginning of the journey, Kuršud-Bek steals Ašik-Kerib's clothes and shows them to his mother and Magul'-Megeri telling them that he is dead. His mother becomes blind from grief, but Magul'-Megeri does not believe Kuršud-Bek. Ašik-Kerib makes music in villages, his fame grows, and he ends in Chalaf²⁵, in the palace of a pasha and leads a rich life. He seems to have forgotten Magul'-Megeri, until, just before the end of the seven-year term, a merchant shows a golden plate belonging to her. He is very far from Tbilisi, but with the help of Chaderiliaz (Saint George), he manages to arrive on time after a trip through three cities, returning exactly on the last day of the seven years. The feast for the marriage between Kuršud-

²² On Bodrov's film, see also J. Andrew, 2005; S. Hutchings, 2007; and H. Ram, 1999, pp. 27-28.

²³ I.L. Andronikov (1977, pp. 392-398) argues that this storyteller was the Azerbaijani poet Achundov. See also A. Gadžiev, 1982, p. 129.

²⁴ See I.L. Andronikov, 1977, pp. 379-391. See also the comments in M.Ju. Lermontov, 1962, IV, p. 647.

²⁵ Now probably the city Aleppo, the ancient name of which is Halab.

Bek and Magul'-Megeri has already begun, but Magul'-Megeri recognises him and Ašik-Kerib proves that Chaderiliaz has helped him by curing his mother's blindness with clay from under the hoof of Chaderiliaz' white horse. Kuršud-Bek leaves Magul'-Megeri to Ašik-Kerib, and Ašik-Kerib proposes Kuršud-Bek to marry his sister.

It is atypical of Lermontov to record a story. Therefore, it is worth investigating why he took an interest in Ašik-Kerib. There are several factors that may have played a role here. First, he may have identified himself with the wandering *ašik* who is looking for love. Second, Lermontov had a Romantic interest in folklore and the exotic. Third, the tale's structure of a journey in different stages may have appealed to him. These three elements will now be discussed in further detail.

Generally, Lermontov distinguishes clearly between men and women. This is apparent in many of his Caucasian works, where Caucasian men and women have different characteristics. Men are typically warriors who take care of their weapons, are proud of their horses and go on raids. Honour and heroism are essential characteristics of men.²⁶ *Beglec* shows that a man who lacks courage and heroism is cast out by all his loved ones. Caucasian women, on the other hand, are typically beautiful and dance, sing and bathe in rivers.²⁷ This results in rather stereotypical, ideal images of masculinity and femininity.

The distinction between men and women is also apparent in other works. Costlow points out that most of the women in *Geroj našego vremeni* (Bëla, Princess Meri and Vera) are associated with categories such as faith, love and affection (see J. Costlow, 2002). In contrast, men are associated with categories such as reflection, fate and gambling. This is particularly evident in, for example, *Fatalist*.

In most of Lermontov's works the male hero is looking for 'salvation', the Romantic desire is always there, but he never succeeds; reflection for him always results in some form of destruction. Typically, the male protagonist is unlucky in love. Women leave him (like Vera in *Geroj našego vremeni*), are inaccessible/far away (the theme of the beloved girl back home in Russia in *Kavkazskij plennik* and *Izmail-Bej*), bore him (like Bëla or Princess Meri in *Geroj našego vremeni*) and/or die (see next paragraph). Moreover, the protagonist's ultimate fate is hardly ever joyful. Like Ašik-Kerib, Pečorin in *Geroj našego vremeni* is essentially searching for love and content to his life. A striking difference between the two is that Ašik-Kerib becomes happy, whereas Pečorin is vexed by a profound feeling of loneliness and emptiness without end and, after a trip to Persia, dies in Russia. Pečorin therewith confirms that the fate of Lermontov's heroes is usually tragic and ends in a feeling of infinite emptiness, madness, or death.²⁸

²⁶ Think of the bravery in, e. g., *Čerkesy* and *Izmail-Bej*, even if the attacks carried out are without success.

²⁷ Of the many examples, see the female characters in the poems *Čerkešenka* (1829; *The Circassian Girl*), *Gruzinskaja pesnja* (1829; *A Georgian Song*), the narrative poem *Čadži Abrek*, and Bëla in *Geroj našego vremeni*. Expectations, however, are not always met. When arriving at the marriage of Bëla's sister, Pečorin is initially disillusioned by the unpretty women he sees.

²⁸ Think also, for example, of the death and madness of the male protagonists in respectively *Men-schen und Leidenschaften* (1830) and *Maskarad* (1835; *Masquerade*).

For women the oppositions mentioned often also result in some form of destruction. In many of Lermontov's works, women are victims (of love) and/or objects of revenge. For example, in *Geroj našego vremeni*, Pečorin soon loses his interest in Bêla. When he then goes hunting, his rival Kazbič kidnaps her, taking her away as "čto-to beloe" (M.Ju. Lermontov, *Pss*, 1937, V, p. 215; "something white") on his horse, and cuts her with a knife, which ultimately leads to her death.²⁹ More or less the same happens with the female character in *Aul Bastundži*, who, after having been kidnapped, returns on the back of a horse, lifeless, wrapped up in a white cloth, again as "čto-to beloe" (M.Ju. Lermontov, *Pss*, 1935, III, p. 185 [XXIII]; "something white"). The heroine in *Kavkazskij plennik* also dies as a result of a love relationship by throwing herself into a river, after which – again – a white cloth comes to the surface as a symbol of her death. In *Kally* and *Chadži Abrek* girls are also victims, which can also be said of Vera and Princess Meri in *Geroj našego vremeni*.

A factor which may have contributed to this pattern are Lermontov's experiences in his younger years. His mother died before he was even three years old; to his great regret, he had hardly any contact with his father and his parents' place was taken by his dominant grandmother. Moreover, Lermontov suffered from scrofula in his youth. These elements may have led to a feeling of loneliness and emptiness.³⁰ In *Ja choču rasskazat' vam (I Want To Tell You)*, Lermontov writes:

Болезнь эта имела важные следствия и странное влияние на ум и характер Саши: он выучился думать. Лишенный возможности развлекаться обыкновенными забавами детей, он начал искать их в самом себе. Воображение стало для него новой игрушкой. Не даром учат детей, что с огнем играть не должно. Но увы! никто и не подозревал в Саше этого скрытого огня, а между тем он обхватил всё существо бедного ребенка. (M.Ju. Lermontov, *Pss*, 1937, V, p. 175)

"This illness had important consequences and a strange influence on the mind and character of Saša: he learned to think. Bereft of the possibility to entertain himself with the usual games of children, he started to look for them in himself. His imagination became his new toy. Not without reason children are taught that they should not play with fire. But, alas!, no one suspected this hidden fire in Saša, but in the meantime it captured the whole essence of the poor child."

Costlow convincingly argues that Pečorin is actually driven by a fear of women, affection and intimacy and that he searches his wellbeing in the opposed sphere of continued travelling, masculinity, emotional distance and reflection (see J. Costlow, 2002). Indeed, the tragedy of Lermontov's heroes, such as Pečorin in *Geroj našego vremeni*, is that they are not able to reconcile these two spheres, to come to a form of synthesis. Focusing on the 'masculine' sphere only is ultimately destructive to both the male hero and his female counterparts.

In *Demon*, the tension between masculinity and femininity is particularly clear. Here, the male element is associated with the demonic, and the female element with

²⁹ P. M. Austin (1986) points at the irony implicit in the name Bêla. On the one hand the root *bela* in Caucasian Turkic languages means 'grief', 'woe', etc. On the other hand, it is associated with the Latin root *bella* for 'beautiful'. J. Costlow (2002, p. 86) connects the name with the Russian word *belyj* and states that it denotes whiteness, purity and blankness. See also P. Urban's note in M. Lermontov, 2006, p. 191 (transl., notes and epilogue: P. Urban).

³⁰ For more biographical information, see the sources mentioned in footnote 2. See also the autobiographically inspired play *Menschen und Leidenschaften*.

the heavenly. As always, the demon's quest for love results in destruction. The girl dies and is taken to heaven, while the demon is destined to eternal loneliness.

An explanation for the different fate of Ašik-Kerib in the folk tale recorded by Lermontov could be that he successfully passes the initiation rite of marriage, whereas Lermontov's own heroes deny the social order and therefore end up in the realm of destruction. Only in *Ašik-Kerib* does the wandering minstrel, despite all difficulties, find peace with his beloved Magul'-Megeri by marrying her, whereas Lermontov's own heroes reject the social world and their inherent initiation processes and for this reason cannot succeed. Ašik-Kerib's different fate may explain the folk tale's attractiveness to Lermontov.

Ašik-Kerib also may have appealed to Lermontov in light of his Romantic interest in folklore and the exotic. This interest is apparent, for example, in the references to different ethnic groups throughout his Caucasian works, such as the Armenians, Chechens, Circassians, Georgians, Kabardas, Kakhétians, Lezgins, Ossetians and Shapsugs.³¹ Moreover, he frequently uses words of Caucasian origin and has an eye for folkloristic and ethnographical detail (think, for example, of Lermontov's own drawings of the region's inhabitants, the description of the wedding in *Běla* and the character sketch *Kavkazec*). Lermontov's recording of *Ašik-Kerib* fits well into this picture, as does the inspiration drawn from the local legend about Queen Tamara in *Demon* and in the poem *Tamara*.

A third reason for Lermontov's interest in *Ašik-Kerib* could be of a literary nature. He may have been attracted by the structure of a travel in different stages, which later also features in *Geroj našego vremeni*.

4.2. Comparison between Lermontov's tale and Paradžanov's interpretation thereof

Paradžanov's 1988 film *Ašik-Kerib* states that it was based on Lermontov's version of the folk tale. The film, nonetheless, deviates in many respects from Lermontov's *Ašik-Kerib*. The deviations, on the one hand, stem from Paradžanov's particular interest in the theme of initiation into manhood, which he articulates much more than Lermontov, and, on the other hand, from the filmmaker's boundless creativity.

The film *Ašik-Kerib* can be seen as the process of a boy developing into a man. Paradžanov's general interest in this issue is also apparent in his earlier 'Caucasian' films *Sajat-Nova* or *Cvet granata* (Armenfil'm, 1968/9; *Sajat Nova* or *The Colour of Pomegranates*) and *Legenda suramskoj kreposti* (1984; *The Legend of the Suram Fortress*). In *Ašik-Kerib*, the theme of initiation is in particular connected with the love story between Ašik-Kerib and Magul'-Megeri. Paradžanov, when compared to Lermontov, adds many details to the story line which result in a strong focus on the

³¹ To a certain extent, the names of these ethnic groups, such as the *čerkesy* (Circassians) that are often mentioned, are used as a Romantic category to indicate the exotic. For example, in chapter XVI of *Kavkazskij plennik*, the same person is first indicated as "čerkes" (M.Ju. Lermontov, *Pss*, 1935, III, p. 29; "Circassian"), then as "čečenec" (ibid.; "Chechen"). In addition, *tatary* (Tatars) is used as a generic term to refer to the inhabitants of the Caucasian region. (See S.N. Durylin, 1940, p. 131.) The variety of names used, though, points at a genuine interest in the variety of ethnic groups in the region.

process of initiation. In his film, we see Aşik-Kerib actually proposing to Magul'-Megeri by offering rose petals. He is, however, proudly and mockingly rejected by her father. Before Aşik-Kerib then leaves on his trip to seek his fortune, he makes a vow to Magul'-Megeri in the Blue Mosque. One could say that the initiation process really starts when Aşik-Kerib crosses a river naked and is robbed of his clothes by his rival Kuršud-Bek and loses his saaz³². His nakedness is covered by villagers who help Aşik-Kerib by giving him a set of very simple clothes. None of these elements is present in Lermontov's tale.

Paradžanov subsequently introduces an entirely new character, Aşik-Kerib's teacher. This teacher returns Aşik-Kerib's saaz to him. The teacher dies while making music for a passing caravan and, while Aşik-Kerib buries him, the teacher's soul flies away as a white dove. This episode refers to Tarkovskij's death, who died in 1986 and to whom the whole film is dedicated. This becomes clear in the last scene of the film, entitled *Tribute to the bride's father*, in which, again, a white dove flies up from a film camera, symbolising Tarkovskij's departure.³³ The loss of the teacher can also be seen as an event in the process of initiation, of becoming independent.

The subsequent marriages of the blind, and of the deaf and dumb, where Aşik-Kerib is asked to play music, are also new elements. After these marriages, he comes to work at the courts of a pasha and a sultan. At the pasha's palace, Paradžanov adds some funny details relating to the theme of manhood. When Aşik-Kerib enters the palace, he steals a guardian's moustache and goatee beard and applies them onto his own face, which suggests an increase of masculinity. At the end of the episode, however, he rips them off his face, as does the sultan with his own. Opposed to these symbols of masculinity is the abundant use of make-up, which has a feminine connotation. Also the encounter with the pasha's harem clearly has to do with Aşik-Kerib's becoming a man.

Generally, the first episodes of Paradžanov's film, parallel with the process of developing manhood, show an increasing line that is absent in Lermontov's version. Aşik-Kerib earns ever more money. His first uncommissioned performance is for a caravan of camels, for which he is rewarded with little puppets (which he buries with the teacher). After that, he is invited to perform as a musician at the marriages of the blind, and of the deaf and dumb. He then moves to ever richer and more powerful surroundings at the courts of the pasha and the sultan, who is the highest in rank. The theme of increasing wealth is accompanied by that of growing imprisonment. At the outset, Aşik-Kerib is naked. Then he is dressed in clothes given to him by poor people. The pasha binds him in golden chains, the sultan in an iron mall around his body. Aşik-Kerib earns more and more money, but, at the same time, his freedom is ever more limited. He seems to forget his beloved Magul'-Megeri and his family at home entirely.

These related developments of initiation into manhood, growing wealth and increasing imprisonment imply a gradual process of alienation and culminate in an existential crisis. Whereas, in Lermontov's story, Aşik-Kerib simply needs to be shown Magul'-Megeri's golden plate to be reminded of her, the process that Aşik-Kerib has

³² Lermontov describes this instrument as a "balalajka tureckaja" (M.Ju. Lermontov, *Pss*, 1937, V, p. 177; "a Turkish balalaika").

³³ For more information about Paradžanov's friendship with Tarkovskij, see V.V. Katanjan, 1994.

to go through in Paradžanov's film is much more complex. After having escaped the tiger at the sultan's court, he is attacked by warriors on horses. With the help of a group of children he escapes from the warriors and goes to a church. The crisis is at its peak when Ašik-Kerib has a nightmare-like vision of his parental house, inhibited by demons. This scene, however, is also the start of the reconciliation process, when he sees his mother's bread. He then decides to go home and succeeds in doing so with the help of Saint George and his white horse.³⁴

Both Lermontov's and Paradžanov's works end with a marriage between Ašik-Kerib and his beloved Magul'-Megeri. In the film, there is the additional marriage of Kuršud-Bek with Ašik-Kerib's sister.

Noteworthy are also the minstrel's guardian angels Aziz and Wale, another addition stemming from Paradžanov's creativity. They appear to Ašik-Kerib at crucial moments in his life, notably before the marriages of the blind and of the deaf and dumb; after the episode at the pasha's palace, warning him of the sultan; when flying home; and during his marriage with Magul'-Megeri.

5. Conclusion

The Caucasus, in which a number of Lermontov's important works are set, has been a major source of inspiration to the author. He greatly appreciated the natural splendour of the region and took a vivid interest in the culture of its inhabitants. Moreover, his Caucasian works feature two main groups of semantic oppositions.

The first set of oppositions, which is evident in, for example, *Kavkazu* and *Kavkazskij plennik*, has interrelated sociological, political and geographical elements. Russia is opposed to the Caucasus, and the oppression of the autocratic tsarist regime is opposed to the freedom associated with the Caucasian region. Moreover, within the Caucasian region, there is an intricate play with the categories of freedom and captivity, in particular in light of the imperialistic war being waged: both Russians and Caucasians are associated with both categories. However, the oppositions between Russians and Caucasians cannot be overcome. A synthesis is not possible.

The second group of semantic oppositions in Lermontov's works operates on a psychological level. There is a clear difference between male and female characteristics, and, in connection with this dichotomy, a longing for love is contrasted with intense solitude, a feeling of circularity, profound emptiness. Lermontov's heroes cannot overcome these contradictions, cannot reconcile them. For the protagonist this typically results in some form of destruction, e.g., madness or death. Likewise, the destruction affects the protagonist's female counterparts, whose fate is usually equally tragic.

The typical oppositions between freedom – captivity, Russians – Caucasian peoples, male – female, love – solitude therefore remain in most instances unresolved.

³⁴ Whereas the white horse that carries Ašik-Kerib home makes three stops in Lermontov's tale, it heads directly for Tbilisi in Paradžanov's film. Nonetheless, Paradžanov refers to the three stops by announcing Saint George and his horse three times in the episode where Ašik-Kerib is helped by children against the attack by warriors. In this episode, at all times together with the children, Saint George and his horse appear two times in a picture and once as an image on the wall of a fortress.

For the characters in Lermontov's works this typically results in destruction in the form of a feeling of emptiness, madness or, ultimately, death. There are only a few exceptions to this pattern. Maksim Maksimych in *Geroj našego vremeni* and the character sketched in *Kavkazec* have lived so long in the Caucasus that they have taken over many of the region's customs and, in this sense, have come to a form of assimilation. Moreover, Lermontov's *Ašik-Kerib* shows a hero who actually reaches his goal and becomes happy with his beloved Magul'-Megeri. It should, however, be noted that this folk tale was recorded, not invented by Lermontov. Only during the Soviet era does Paradžanov give a truly original interpretation of *Ašik-Kerib*, in which he stresses the importance of the initiation process leading to the marriage between Ašik-Kerib and Magul'-Megeri.

Lermontov's Caucasian works are closely intertwined with the political realities of his time. They have literary roots in the works of Puškin. Moreover, they have had an important impact on the Caucasian theme in later art works. The semantic oppositions in Lermontov's works are playfully refashioned in works of later writers and artists in the nineteenth century, in the Soviet era and in the post-Soviet period.

Besides Paradžanov's *Ašik-Kerib*, this is apparent from Tolstoj's *Kavkazskij plenik*, which, like Puškin's and Lermontov's versions of the same story, is set against the background of the imperial war in the nineteenth century. The oppositions which are naturally connected with war seem to have disappeared in the Soviet era's film *Kavkazskaja plennica*, which, with a touch of irony, suggests that all tensions between ethnic groups have disappeared in line with Communist ideology. However, in post-Soviet works by Makanin and Bodrov, the war-related antagonisms feature again in a forceful manner against the background of the conflict in Chechnya.

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